

Linda Clair
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 5c – Wednesday afternoon discussion

Question: I'm in the practice, very much in the practice. Every sit is different but it's intensifying. I took a rest this afternoon and it softened a bit, took the edge off a little, which I think might be a good thing to do from now on. Just try to do things that take the edge, you know, so it's not constantly...

Linda: Yes, it's really important to do that, especially if you're feeling too wired. If you're feeling really wired up, just soften, do something nice and simple and soothing. Do soothing things. And a short nap can really take the edge off it, even if it's a micro sleep.

Question: Yes, a nap, a bit of sunshine, simple, soothing things. I was going to talk about the sit but I don't know if I need to. I can't really judge them anymore. There was a bit of murkiness in this one but it was interesting. A bit like the tentacles that you have spoken about, like the thought and the thinking is the addiction I suppose, but also, the thinking kind of runs into the thought.

Linda: There's a whole lot of different layers.

Question: There's a whole lot going on and I don't think I can even separate the thinking from the thought and I'm not even going to try. And the ego also is fuelling the habit – my ego – it's really addicted to the habit itself. It's quite interesting. It was a bit of a shock realising how it moves, and I noticed that it fogs me up when I'm not looking, kind of. And then this thing has been going on where suddenly it comes from all angles and I'm watching it all the time. Being alert is exhausting, but I'm okay.

Question: You know I talked to N. about this experience I had about a week ago last Sunday. We thought it would be a good idea to share it. An experience that left me feeling a little bit raw, so you'll have to excuse my voice. I did a three-and-a-half-month retreat in New Zealand, and it was a silent solitary retreat with no teacher. I'd finished the retreat and I'd got to the night before I was due to leave for Auckland and come over here. I did a last meditation in the evening and towards the end of that meditation I had this strong feeling that I didn't exist – and I knew that this wasn't enlightenment, I sort of knew it was in my mind, and therefore I tried to ground myself. But the feeling was that I was going insane, that I actually had no reference point anywhere with anything or with anybody. And I just had this feeling that there I was in the middle of New Zealand, something like eleven o'clock at night – and the centre was empty because it was Sunday evening, so there wasn't even any staff there – and I had nobody to talk to about what was happening. Eventually I managed to get to the point, about half past two in the morning, where I could dare to close my eyes – because my whole life had gone. You know, I felt that at my age I'd been preparing if you like for death, and I could accept death, but this was insanity: and, "How was I going to get home?" About my sons, and everything, was going on. The after-effects of this are that for the last eight or nine days I don't really sleep and I have terrible headaches every day.

Linda: So you're still not sleeping now?

Question: I'm sort of sleeping but last night, as an example, I can go to bed at quarter past nine, I wake up at twelve and I'm awake for an hour, and then I may sleep and may wake up at four o'clock and I'm awake for a couple of hours.

Linda: That is actually quite normal during a retreat. I'd say probably a lot of people here are experiencing the same thing. So don't worry about the sleep thing, because it just comes with the territory. And it's only, for me, in the last year my sleep settled down and most of the time it's really good. But up until then I never knew how it would be – it would still be like that. Other times it'd be really good. So really don't worry about that, but it can add to the feeling of mental instability when you are exhausted. And it's another reason it's really good during the day to just lie down, not even with the intention of going to sleep, but just lie down for a while and not do anything and just rest, and it can take the edge off it a bit. So go on.

Question: Mind wise I feel that I'm functioning, but I don't really have a clear idea about what I'm doing from one moment to the next.

Linda: Neither do I.

Question: There's actually a lot of this, because I've been here and I've been meditating with you and with everybody here. And the meditation, the actual retreat has gone on as normal, as any retreat would. So I've been feeling very grounded, and very grounded in the meditation, very grounded in the breathing, so there's a sense of everything of going on as it should. But then there's also this sense of not really being with-it. And again, that might be good, because a lot of ideas that I've had about myself have dropped off over the last three, four months. One of those was to be super-efficient, so the fact that I've not been efficient at all really this week – as people who've been doing food prep with me will verify – so that's probably a good thing.

So in a way there's sort of a normalcy about it, but this morning – this is the reason why I wanted to talk to you – this morning I felt that because I was grounded, and because I was feeling grounded, that I ought to visit this moment in my life a week ago last Sunday again and see if I could put it to rest. And as soon as I went near it I just sort of went into panic – palpitations and breathing and so forth. And I don't know if it's relevant but throughout my life – now we talk more about mental health – I've had trauma in childhood and I've had anxiety throughout my life. So I don't know whether the mind is picking up on that and therefore feels that there is a vulnerability around that area and therefore that's what it throws at me, in terms of trying to disrupt what's going on.

Linda: Your mind knows you intimately because you have fed it and nurtured it and created it. It knows your weaknesses, your Achilles heel, and it will use that whenever it can to try and destabilise you in whatever way it can. So even though it was good in some ways doing this retreat, I really wouldn't recommend someone go and do a three-month retreat by themselves, because it can lead to this scary instability. It's one reason it's good to sit in a group with a teacher – I feel seven days is plenty. I know some people say, "We want to do more – ten days," seven days of this at a time is plenty. And you tend to put everything into that seven-days that you can, rather than knowing that you've got maybe ten days, or twenty days, or whatever.

So the reason I'm here, and the reason it's great to sit with anyone who is realised, is that they're automatically going to ground you and be your earth and your safety. And so you can tend to extend yourself a bit more because you do feel that safety net. That's what I am – your safety net. And everyone here too, and everyone connects and is grounding each other. And so doing something like that by yourself would have had some really beneficial effects, of course, but I really wouldn't recommend it again to do that. And any sort of thing like that that you've had, severe depression or things like that, and as soon as that comes up there's going to be this fear because you've already felt that before and you're scared it's going to get worse again.

There's no need to revisit any moment in your life. It will happen naturally as you do this – things will come up – but I wouldn't manipulate it or force it or say, "I've got to go back to this moment because there's all this fear there." You've got to let it come up naturally and at the right time, when you're grounded enough to be able to cope with it, and then it might come up. I don't feel it's repressing it but I don't think you need to recreate that mental instability, that craziness that you felt, that probably everyone at some time doing this has felt and has been a bit scared of. It's a very big thing. You almost feel sometimes like you're schizophrenic because there's these two parallel things going on and you really don't know who you are, where you are, sometimes. And that's why I just keep going on about grounding, grounding, grounding. You have to be so grounded and earthed because so much is going to come up. And that allows things to come up safely. So, yes.

And it really does help to express something like this that seems very personal but is really relevant to everyone here. It will make it much more powerful and you able to deal with it if you can express it like this too. It's a great thing to do, even if you feel nervous talking about stuff.

So you feel okay now? You feel a bit more settled? (Yes.) So if it does come up again just let it come up, but make sure you keep coming back to your body, keep it simple. But it might not, who knows?

Question: I had an experience the other day that I wanted your reflection on too. This retreat has been very physical for me. It's been very much about pain and responses to pain, and physical feelings in my body, and resistance I think too. Probably, by the sounds of it, like it has been for a lot of people. And I've been pushing through pain – I've got my old friend the knee pain has come back with a vengeance and it's been joined by this new neck pain and pain in the base of my skull. I've never had that before. But anyway, the first sit yesterday I was getting really bad knee pain in my right knee and, as a few people have, I've had bad pain during this retreat. And a few times I've managed to go in and sit with it and it's diminished and that's worked quite well. So I've tried to do it again and sort of dived into the pain and sat with it, and I was able to see it as just another sensation, and it started to diminish. But then as soon as that happened, I had this wave of nausea come over me. And I know nausea is often associated with strong pain too. But the only other time this has ever happened to me was about a year and a half ago at a Sunday meditation at your house when I keeled over and fainted. It was the same sort of thing – I felt this nausea and then I started feeling strange in the head and I thought, "Oh, I think I'm going to... bonk." Before I'd finished the thought I'd fainted. This time I didn't faint but I had the nausea and it started to build and I thought, "I'd better get out of here before I throw up on somebody." And then I got that – it's a really hard feeling to explain – it's probably like hypoxia or something, probably low blood pressure.

Linda: Like clammy, cold?

Question: No, not really, it was like pressure. And my vision started to shut down and my hearing, it felt a bit like the old black and white TV set with a tube when you turn it off and the image just goes down to a little white point, it was kind of like that. And I thought, "Oh, I'm going to faint again." But I couldn't move and I couldn't do anything. I thought I've got to get my head to the floor. But I didn't faint, it just kept building, and it felt like my head was going to blow off like a champagne cork. Then somehow I managed to get my head to the floor and that brought a wave of relief. Then the bell went very shortly after that and I managed to get myself up and I got the bathroom and sat in there for a while, and then I got up to my room. I missed yoga. I felt really bad for a while, like shaky and ill. But then by the time breakfast was on I felt much better, and I ate breakfast and I felt fine afterwards. So I've got no idea what it was about. I've heard you talk before about how that nausea can be related to energetic build up that you're not ready for or something.

Linda: Well, you're ready for it because you got it. The nausea is fear, so when you feel it it's also in my experience a bluff. A lot of people have felt very strong nausea. I remember B. used to sit for quite a while with a bucket next to her because she really felt she was going to be sick. So you do the opposite to what you're used to doing. So with the nausea, instead of trying to get away from it and stopping it, you go towards it and breathe into it. I can't say for sure what will happen when you do that but I've had it before and I breathe into it and get very close to it. It's like the opposite to what you usually do when you feel nausea when, "Ahh, all I want to do is get rid of this, or throw up," or whatever. But nobody has ever actually thrown up yet.

So breathe deeply, experiment, and breathe deeply into it. If you do feel faint like that put your head down. And maybe you did have a bit of low blood pressure or low blood sugar. It's good to have something very light before the first sit, and for some people that helps. I often have a few crackers before the first sit. But breathe into the nausea and it's like a showdown, you go, "Okay, I'll breathe into this," and it's like you're facing your fear. And rather than backing off, going into it, and see what happens, and usually it dissipates. And it doesn't mean it won't come back again, but once you've really faced it, it never really puts you off again because you know what to do. You go, "Okay, I'll breathe into it and it will be okay." But with the fainting – that can happen, so if you *really* feel like you're going to faint put your head down. But for as long as possible stay up.

Question: Well I did, because it felt like it went on – the nausea didn't really worry me apart from being afraid that I might vomit on someone. But it was that strange feeling of internal pressure and energy afterwards. I didn't faint but it felt like it was going to blow me apart; it was quite intense.

Linda: Yes, it can feel like that at times, like your head's going to blow off. The whole thing, you're like this pressure cooker and that's what happens. This is about containing energy and containing more and more energy. When you have a lot of pain and you're sitting with it and not moving you're containing an enormous amount of energy. And you have looked different this retreat. You've looked stronger, deeply stronger, and more independent. That's how I've feel you've looked this retreat. You've been very self-contained, more so than usual. And that's why you're starting to really feel that pressure. So if you really need to release it do that and lie down. It's better not to faint because P. wouldn't like that. ☺ She's moved I notice. I don't think you will faint again. Usually people only do it once.

Question: I have felt actually better since that happened.

Linda: Mm, so don't be scared. Just keep doing what you're doing. Go for it. And it is a very physical, body-based thing, and very, very energetic, and you just can't overestimate the energy that's involved in this whole thing, it huge, it's just huge.

Question: I realised I usually don't ask questions precisely about my own practice – I listen to other people's. And something has become very clear that as I'm counting, and there's also a lot of mental activity, that my breath starts pulling the breath in, like deeply, and not quite connecting it to the belly. As though the breath in becomes more important than connecting it to the belly, because there's a type of anxiety that I'm missing. You know, I space off and I come back to it in a zealous way, and then it becomes a bit hyperventilating.

Linda: Because you're too far up here?

Question: Yes. Then I have to stop and calm myself. I remember the first time some years ago when you talked about the counting, probably the first weekend retreat I did. When you talked about the counting you described the counting very briefly: "It's like one, two..." and you extended the sound of the numbers. And at the time I thought, "Oh, what a great idea." But I was nervous that I hadn't really learned it properly, how to count – it was almost like I was a child about it. And a question at this point in time would be embarrassing – well forgive me, you know – so this is about, "How long that counting?" because I go up into the upper-chest rather than down.

Linda: You've going to have to force it down. So really be firm about it, because otherwise you will hyperventilate. So breathe in – and it's not really the main breath even though it's breathing in – and when you breath out it's from down here so it's, "One..." and it's with the breath. And as I was saying before, it's almost like you're breathing out of your belly. And of course it's not, but for me it is.

Question: That's what triggered me to ask the question. I didn't know I was going to ask but yesterday you said to somebody, "It's like you're breathing out of the belly," and I went, "Oh, how do I do that?"

Linda: Well I don't know, it just happens, and it's hard to explain but that's how it feels to me. You have to really, because there is so much anxiety down there at times, you have to almost force your attention down there. And do it whether you feel like it or not. And go down there, and then after a while it does become much more natural. If you count with the breath it isn't going to be, "One, two, three, four," it's going to be, "One... two... three..." and then you get lost and go back to one again, and so on until ten. So it's more a bodily counting, and it's more sensual and fluid. It's not just this rote counting.

Question: Yes, and I'm not doing it all the time, just talking about these periods when there's an anxiety going on, which I haven't thought through in some way.

Linda: And you would have had more anxiety than usual lately.

Question: Yes, I've had a lot of anxiety.

Linda: So you've been probably holding on and just keeping it together. So now is the time to start letting it go. And everything's okay, you don't have to do anything right now, just let it go for a while. He'll be okay, whatever happens, and it's okay whatever happens.

Question: Yes, in my best moments I do agree with you.

Linda: And he's okay with it.

Question: The big anxiety has left me and then I'll just focus on my own neurosis, and not sleep and then talk about that. Just one more point about bringing the breath down to the belly – because I'm not *feeling* my belly, I contract my belly consciously. What do you think about that?

Linda: Put your hand on it for a while just to get used to feeling it. And it will contract a bit at times but really feel it and that might change things. Good, it's a good basic, simple question.

Question: I just wanted to say thanks to R. for sharing because I've had an almost identical kind of experience with lots of nausea and pain, especially knee pain and neck and back pain. When I first started sitting with you, I just couldn't stand it and I'd be moving around, and probably disrupting everyone around me. Since I've finally worked out to sit on the zafu in this particular way I've been a little more stable. But I've noticed every day things are a little bit easier in the pain department, very slightly. But last night I was really wanting to take it on because I thought I want to sit through the evening sit without any moving. And my old friends, knee pain and neck pain and back pain came back, and the nausea was pretty strong actually. And I felt at one point, I just said, "You can handle this." I was really firm with myself. And it was almost unbearable but I got through it to the end – and I have to say I was very glad when the bell went – but I did. And I did notice some fluctuations – all the way through it was not constant pain ten-out-of-ten – it would sort of go eight or seven, or sometimes fleetingly disappear. So then I found myself contemplating the nature of what it actually was. Because I thought, "If it's the sort of damaging pain that's damaging, then why are my knees handling it better every single day I sit?" It's not getting progressively worse. So I just kept feeding that information back to myself and remembering the things that you'd said about how these things transform. So it was a kind of a small win, so thanks for your encouragement.

Linda: I wouldn't call it a *small* win.

Question: For me it felt like a win.

Linda: I'd say a big win, that's what I meant, not a small one.

Question: And I think some part of me knew that nausea was about fear.

Question: I just wanted to say in this sit I had this incredibly strong experience of getting totally frustrated with the mind coming constantly. At some point I got so angry, almost as if I'd tightened up everything – all the bits that were hurting so much. I thought, "I'm not letting another thought happen." I can't describe all the detail but it became totally obviousness how the murkiness and feeling not quite in my body was because of the thoughts, and that I could feel the thoughts bleeding off the energy from the body.

Linda: No, it's not because of the thoughts, it's not that. And if you blame things – subtly or not subtly – on thinking or thoughts it's going to set up this: good and bad, me and you. And you're going to try and fight them and stop them. When you said you weren't going to, "Let another thought happen" – it's not about that. You have to work *with* the thinking. And you're the one thinking – it's not the thoughts attacking you – you're the one thinking. So you have to get deeply into you; not the thoughts, but that habit that you've developed. What the thoughts are about, and the thoughts, don't matter at all. And I felt the same way at some time. It was actually when I was in Japan – I should have known better. I said, "Oh, the thoughts are causing me so much suffering and pain." The master just laughed at me. Like, "You idiot." So it's not the thoughts causing your suffering. They're not causing anything. So don't try and stop thinking.

Question: I see what you're saying and I'm sure that I do that over and over. It was when I didn't put attention on the thoughts and I brought it back deeply into the body. It's almost like I had to wrench myself. And each time – that's what I'm trying to describe – each time I wrenched myself back it was like this explosion of energy in my body. That's what it felt like.

Linda: Yes, that's really good, and that's a better description. So that's different to what I felt you were saying before. Like it is difficult when all you want to do is go towards that thought and start thinking and you have to really make that huge super-human effort at times to bring yourself back. But each time you do, you're becoming more enlightened. So make that effort and keep doing it. So the most beautiful thing is you can say, "I create my own suffering." And if that's true, well, you can un-create it. And you're the one who has to do it, and that's what you're doing. So each time you do that you're going, "I'm not going to suffer. I'm going to take, not control, but the power." And it does make you stronger. You'll get incredibly tired at times doing it, but it's what you need to do.

Question: I just felt I had to do it to get away from the murkiness. I feel like this murkiness has been driving me crazy and I don't want that now, so I'm on to it. And it was something that you said about feeling the strength of that – it's fantastic.